

Defense Authorization Act focuses on Force Protection and Personnel Benefits

WASHINGTON, D.C. – This Afternoon, Congressman Sanford Bishop voted in favor of the 2005 National Defense Authorization Act (H.R. 4200), which sets policies and funding levels for the nation's military. The legislation authorized \$445.6 billion in budget authority for the Department of Defense (DoD) and national security programs of the Department of Energy (DoE).

"The Defense Authorization bill is one of the most important pieces of legislation that we pass in Congress. It ensures that the brave men and women who risk their lives for us on the battlefield have the tools and equipment they need to get the job done and keep them safe. It also provides for much-needed quality of life improvements for our service members and their families here at home," said Congressman Bishop.

Among the many initiatives included in the bill, are a 3.5 percent across-the-board pay raise, special pay and bonuses and improved military housing – as well as a complete phase-out of out-of-pocket housing expenses. H.R. 4200, which passed the House of Representatives with a vote of 359 to 14, will now go to the full Senate for passage and then be sent to President Bush for his signature and enactment into law.

"I commend my colleagues on the Armed Services Committee for their hard work in advancing this legislation. With more than 200,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines serving in the global war on terrorism, giving priority to our troops is more important now than ever," said Congressman Bishop.

Additional highlights of the 2005 Defense Authorization Act:

- \$25 billion to support the Global War on Terror's operational costs, personnel expenses and procurement of new equipment.
- Enhanced health care benefits for reservists and their family members.
- Elimination of the Survivor Benefit penalty, which currently reduces benefits paid to surviving military spouses once they become eligible for Social Security benefits.
- Full implementation of concurrent receipt for disabled retirees considered 100 percent disabled. As part of the 10-year phase in plan for concurrent receipt, these retirees will now receive both their full military retirement pay and their VA disability compensation.
- Eliminate a statutory ceiling on the military housing privatization initiative to build and revitalize more family and unaccompanied housing at domestic military bases.
- Rapid acquisition and armor initiatives to protect our troops.